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CORRESPONDENCE-STUDY

# MODERN EUROPEAN HISTORY AND THE GREAT WAR

## A SYLLABUS

by

PROFESSOR VICTOR COFFIN

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[1] For further lists see Cambridge Modern History, Vols. X, XI, and XII.



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# MODERN EUROPEAN HISTORY AND THE GREAT WAR

## I. Europe as the Center of World History. Exploitation of the Modern World by Europe. Breakdown of Europe.

ELEMENTS OF EUROPEAN CIVILIZATION—Ancient History is for the most part Mediterranean history, and through it the Mediterranean region appears as wholly within the European field in a degree not found again until our own time. There is no background, then, for non-European development, and the main results of the development of civilization in Egypt and Assyria and Palestine were soon absorbed by the purely European regions of the North Mediterranean, so that antiquity ends with the concentration of its elements of development on European soil. The Mediaeval period sees the spread of these elements over the whole European continent, while the rest of the world passes, historically speaking, more or less out of sight. But while antiquity had been thus developing the combined Mediterranean foundations of modern history and transferring them to a limited area in Europe, the remoter parts of Europe had been filling up with Asiatic immigrants—Celtic, Teutonic, Slavic—and the spreading of the Mediterranean civilization through the Middle Ages meant the civilizing, or Europeanizing, of

these Asiatic immigrants (and of later arrivals from Asia, as Magyars, Bulgarians, Turks). But these elements in turn modified that civilization in receiving it, so we may say that the civilization wrought out in Europe up to the modern period was largely built out of elements that were not European. The best blood and brain of Asia and Africa had crowded into the European corner of the world, up to the encircling seas and oceans, and there, brought of necessity to a stand, had been made into instruments for the further development of the Mediterranean culture.

EUROPEAN EXPANSION—It is this Europe, then, compounded of the select of the Eastern Hemisphere, that becomes and remains the center of the world, and that, in the Modern period, spreads through the world the European peoples and the European civilization. This is the main theme of Modern History, this Europeanizing of the world, and this long process of European expansion must be kept in mind in beginning the examination of the historical origins of a European war that has become a World War, we cannot fully understand how it so becomes a world war without having in mind this expansion of European power and culture that is the chief moving process of modern history.

PHASES OF THIS EXPANSION—We cannot here follow this expansion but it is necessary to glance at some of the notable characteristics of this Europeanizing of the world, and especially at some distinctions between different phases of it. There is an Old Regime and a New Regime to be distinguished in this history, as in the domestic development of Europe proper. There is a curious parallelism, also, in the fact that, as the Old Regime exploitation of the world was brought (for the most part) to an end by the great revolutionary movements at the end of the eighteenth century (in Europe and America), so the New Regime exploitation seems destined to end with the present great explosion of war. We will consider the characteristics and conditions of the Old Regime expansion of Europe, the building up of the Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, French, and English colonial empires. This period ends with the American and French revolutions (which begin the ending of the Old Regime in Europe) after a slow breaking down through the eighteenth century, caused mainly by the contests of the colonizing states. The second epoch of colonizing or exploitation does not immediately follow the restoration in Europe, but the continuous development of the British Empire furnishes a transition period or connecting link. The New Regime of empire-building in the

later nineteenth century does not include the Americas, now fully occupied, but there come in now older regions, such as China and Turkey, that are disintegrating. The aims and processes are now more completely economic than in the first period, and Capitalism and High Finance take control. There is a transfer of European capital rather than of peoples; hence a process of making proletariats in large degree abroad, as at home. Governments follow in the wake of capitalistic enterprise, and real colonization becomes secondary.

PARALYSIS OF EUROPE—The paralysis of Europe by the war—a fatal breakdown, destined probably to end the old exploitation of the world, and to endanger European leadership in the world—Americanism as a possible successor in leadership.

## II. Autocracies, Aristocracies, and Bureaucracies of Europe. European Parliamentarism and Diplomacy.

AMERICA AND EUROPE CONTRASTED—Importance of realizing the difference between American and European public life and government—the American knows nothing of "governing classes," though he has come to suspect that he should give more attention to the matter of governing interests—in practically all European countries, however, there are not only the same industrial and financial governing interests as here, but, in addition, behind or above them, older, more strongly entrenched governing classes—of the six Great Powers, four (England, Germany, Austria, Russia) were before the war more or less dominated by the long-established Landed Aristocracies and Professional Bureaucracies, while in the remaining two (France and Italy) the landed aristocracies were of much less strength, but the bureaucracies were equally strong—three of the six (Germany, Austria, Russia) were strong monarchies, more or less autocratic, which means that the policies and administrations were in the hands of executives whom the popular will had not established and over whom the people had but little influence—the trained Professional Bureaucracy hence common to all, and everywhere constituted more or less a close corporation practically independent of the electorate and devoted first of all to executive interests—everywhere also the naval and military power was under constant control of the executive, and where that executive was permanently established felt itself to be set apart from the people and devoted without reserve to the executive policy—national representa-

tive bodies existed in all the states, but could assume control of the state only in England, France, and Italy, though having everywhere a large amount of power with respect to new laws or new taxes—wide electoral franchise in the election of these bodies existed everywhere, but free political action at the polls was limited by capitalistic and aristocratic and administrative influences—the bureaucracies were drawn almost entirely from the privileged families of the upper, middle industrial and professional classes and from the titled aristocratic families; these officials (and the officers of the army and navy) were trained from youth along governmental lines, and were thus for the most part weaned away from popular points of view and identified with the idea of Governing Classes.

A special position and character were everywhere accorded to the diplomatic service, regarded as especially executive and confidential, and operating everywhere more or less under the Old Regime aristocratic and exclusive conditions—ability to hold one's own in polite or aristocratic society was regarded as essential, and hence the service continued to be monopolized in most countries by members of the older aristocracies—these representatives of the executive power regarded themselves as its confidential agents, and popular knowledge of its work or methods was repelled; even in the states under Parliamentary control the representatives of the people were similarly kept at a distance. The foreign relations of each state it was assumed must be secretly administered, and the records of this administration for generations back were open only to the executive and its confidential agents—the people everywhere could have, therefore, only general ideas of the aims and methods and principles of these policies, and could never know the exact relations with any other state or the business that was pending at any time.

Foreign Relations Secretly Administered—Evident, therefore, that European Government was everywhere being conducted in the field of Foreign Relations in almost complete independence of the people, and that in the field of domestic administration the policies or acts of Government could be only imperfectly controlled—of course, in England, France, and Italy the Ministry of the day knew that the continuance of its power depended on its measures or their results commending themselves to the people; but in Germany, Austro-Hungary, and Russia, unless the government needed new revenues or new laws it could disregard the popular attitude—and the actual administering officials did constantly disregard it, knowing that their personal interests were in no way dependent on popu-

lar approval—and these individuals it will be remembered were for the most part set apart by birth and education and social connections in a select class, with special relations to the monarchical head of the state and with an inborn resentment of popular claims.

CLASS ANTAGONISMS—Was especially in Central Europe that these anti-popular aspects of government or public life were pronounced—no other landed or titled aristocracies or professional bureaucracies were so anti-popular and so reactionary as the German, Austrian, and Hungarian; none felt themselves identified with the ruling house in so intimate and personal a way—in the Upper Legislative Chambers they were vested with great power and in local rural government the landed families remained supreme—England had had the same system in the Old Regime, but it had been rapidly breaking down, though the personnel of English upper politics and administration remained still preponderantly aristocratic—and if the English landed families were no longer the rulers of the country-side they in most cases remained the leaders.

Relation of all this to the justice of making distinctions between the governments and peoples of Europe.

## III. The New Militarism and the New Imperialism. The Politics of High Finance. The Dominating Fact of the Development of the British and German Empires.

MILITARISM—Modern militarism, an offshoot, for the most part, of modern nationalism—the leadership in its development is assumed by Prussia because of the nationalism developed by the crushing of the old Prussia by Napoleon—its development in Prussia proceeds on the basis of the Prussian theory of the State, of Prussian autocratic centralized administration, and of Prussian application of Science to the Art of War—all resources of the nation directed to this end—plans developed for the using of these resources with complete ruthlessness and with defiance of all previously acknowledged restraints—on principle that necessity of the State is the supreme law—the identifying of war and culture and the thesis as to the inherent Teutonic supremacy on basis of inherent Teutonic superiority.

IMPERIALISM—Last quarter of the nineteenth century marked in Europe by a curious revival of feudal and autocratic points of view in political theory and practice—common to the large states though appearing in different ways—concurrent with Imperialism in for-

eign politics or policies, with extreme Nationalism, and with Protectionism (commercial warfare)—the main manifestation in Germany where there is a tradition and practice of autocratic paternalism, and where the Bonapartist State Socialism is developed by Bismarck—he defies Parliamentarism, deludes democracy, and aims to buy the support of the masses for autocracy by an advanced social policy—in the succeeding regime the support of middle class industrial and financial Liberalism is sought by catering to industrial interests, while High Finance becomes the right arm of bureaucratic autrocracy and an ally of Militarism and Imperialism—for indeed modern imperialism is perhaps best explained by reference to the unbounded ambition and unscrupulous practices of industrial leaders in modern life; in the latest period, government in Europe comes to receive its impulse largely from men of this sort and the States develop in their foreign policies a corresponding ambition and ruthlessness—hence probable that the chief responsibility lies with Finance and Industry and their great exponents; representatives of the older aristocracies are more timid and conservative, less active and insatiable—states anxious to increase their resources come to rely mainly on the leaders of these new great enterprises; at times Governments are drawn unwittingly or without definite policy into imperialistic aims or courses through the initiative of such leaders—these tendencies manifested in all great states and the new imperialistic policies come into feverish competition over the whole earth.

British and German Imperialism—The main illustrations of this process and the results found in the development and constantly growing rivalry for the last fifty years of the British and German Empires—this the main cause of the Great War.

## IV. Modern European Economic Development. Domination of Politics by Economic Interests. The Economic Interpretation of History and the War of Classes.

Growing Economic Aspect of Modern History—The Growing leadership of economic factors and interests in modern history—growth of population and capital the natural bases of modern Capitalism and Proletarianism—supplemented in most parts of Europe by vicious land regimes, continuing or reconstructing feudal serfdom and enslaving or expropriating the peasant—the modern industrial system developed (Industrial Revolution) on these bases—the older

aristocracies now reinforced by another, a Plutocracy, grown out of the new industrial opportunities—as the State finds its serach for additional resources dependent mainly on industrial development the representatives of this development rapidly win a steadily growing influence over state policies and in political parties—the intensification of industrial and commercial life causes the average man to become indifferent to politics and the idealism of the French Revolution flickers out—there follows an age of political realism and business administration, with increasing disregard of the interests of the masses—a new Regime of Privilege—the slow development of Humanitarianism a prelude to Socialism.

Socialist Development—The relations between nineteenth century Radicalism and Socialism—the development of the socialistic doctrines and platforms—the partial recovery of Liberalism from the paralyzing effects of the industrial revolution—the socialist parties in politics and the development of State Socialism—the latest phases of European radicalism—the helplessness of socialism in the war crisis.

## V. Nineteenth Century Development of Democracy in Europe.

Beginnings of Modern Democracy—American and French Revolutions—The consideration of this must always be based on the American and French Revolutions though of course its history does not begin there—error in assuming that advance of democracy has been steady and continuous since that time; as matter of fact has been fluctuating, and has received in latest period some serious setbacks—as shown by the fact that we are now told that it is again fighting for its life.

The main question concerns political organization and operation, whether the problems of the present day state can be adequately dealt with through a democratic organization and operation of administration—it is a question of practical politics, and the conditions of government today are so different from those of the epoch of the Declaration of Independence and of the Declaration of the Rights of Man that we cannot any longer meet the question simply by reaffirming our faith in the political philosophy of our forefathers—light can be got mainly by following the historical development.

Slow and Uncertain Advance of Democracy—The Democracy of the French Revolution was of course thoroughly discredited by the course of the Revolution and Napoleonic Empire, and being de-

nounced as the cause of the long wars it was natural that Europe should take measures against it, and that the system it had attacked should have been continued and reconstructed as far as possible—what it had attacked and sworn enemity to was essentially not either Monarchy or practical autocracy, for the Napoleonic Empire could claim and did claim to be bulit on and to be carrying on the principles of the Revolution—what it had attacked was the whole Regime of Privilege, of privileged governing classes and interests, and the warfare against this regime was for the most part continued by the Napoleonic autocracy—but still that autocracy also aided the privileged or governing classes to reestablish themselves, and after the Empire they everywhere are found again in control—but the basis of their power had nevertheless been destroyed wherever Republican or Imperial France had extended the revolutionary principles; the process of peasant emancipation could not be long arrested any more than the downfall of guild monopoly in trade and industry; nor could the progress of the placing of constitutional restrictions on administration be stayed. The constitutional development that went on was, however, on the English rather than the French model, and it was not perceived that it must yield eventually the same democratic result—the surviving exponents of the French Revolution apparently did not perceive this any better than the moderate Liberalism of the time, and the successive radicals or republican outbreaks give reactionaries an opportunity every now and then, and help to keep liberalism conservative—and steady improvement of administration cuts ground from under feet of the Republican agitation—a final blow given to it by the new Nationalism.

Democratic Failures and the New Nationalism—The democratic failures of 1848 seemed to have given final blow to French Revolutionary idealism, and the following quarter century is a period of active warlike nationalist expansion and consolidation—the new national governments extend the field of administrative operation, the extensions being for the most part called for in the interests of the rapid development of the Industrial Revolution; the middle-class representatives of these interests settle down to a tacit alliance with the older governing elements that might be expressed as an alliance of these elements (Autocracy, Aristocracy, Bureaucracy) with moderate Constitutionalism and Capitalism—and the alliance is directed against extreme democracy, though shows of concessions are made to the latter (as by Bismarck in his ac-

ceptance of the popularly elected Reichstag), and English Parliamentarism comes everywhere into vogue. Meanwhile the Rights of Man had found a new expression in the social philosophy of Marx and others, and Socialism had begun its warfare against the new governing elements. This Socialism maintains a great distrust of Parliamentarism, and the extensions of the franchise that steadily go on are brought about more through the political maneuvers of the contending political parties than by popular pressure—to fight Socialism a State Socialism comes into administrative practice, this being incidentally a considerable impetus to the extension of the work of government and the centralizing of its machinery. In the last years of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth Parliamentarism falls almost everywhere into discredit for its inefficiency and corruption, and fails consequently to make any progress toward the securing of popular control over administration—even in the few places where such a control was reached it failed to provide satisfaction for the extremist demands, and the putting of these demands almost everywhere into a socialistic form enabled the central bureaucratic administrations to keep place by appealing to the fears of the moderate, thus keeping up the alliance also between capitalism and the adversaries of popular government.

Socialism Begins Its Warfare Against Governing Elements—All this then would seem to mean that democratic progress had really been more or less checked or diverted, that selected governing classes and interests had retained or increased their defensive and offensive powers, that Capitalism perhaps was paralyzing Liberalism. The proletariat masses were looked on by capitalism as part of its equipment, and by the older governing interests as "food for powder"—but at the same time the central bureaucratic administration, controlled by special interests, seemed to be justifying their control by effective administration and by an enlightened social policy—but the war was to show that this was a small benefit as against the menace of the masses of being plunged without consultation into hopeless misery.

**VI. The European Territory and State System From Points of View of Race and Language, and of Physical and Economic Geography. Relations to This of Variations in European Culture and Institutions. The Problem of Nationality.**

Well-established conclusions as to historical effects of climate and of physical and economic geography—an examination of the European territory from these points of view—the mystery of race and the danger of undue consideration to it—the facts as to racial and linguistic divisions in Europe—some considerations with regard to variations in culture and institutions among the European peoples—the elements and degree of cultural unity in Europe; how the three great divisions (Latin, Teutonic, Slav) are affected by religious history—the mystery of nationality and the necessity of reaching some conclusions as to its political import.

**VII. The Problems of the Great Powers in Europe. Germany and Central Europe. Nationalism and Its Extensions (Pan-Germanism, Panslavism, etc.).**

CENTRAL EUROPEAN DEVELOPMENT—The warlike aspects of Modern European history; some of the causes and results—practically all problems located in or reaching back into Central Europe, the result mainly of the racial and linguistic mixture and of physiography—the eighteenth century breakdown of the old Central Europe completed by the French Revolutionary period, and the Nineteenth Century began with makeshifts—the new Nationalism comes in as a transforming force and by 1871 would seem to have led to satisfactory settlements—but results in reality sadly deficient and spoiled by the later development—the Bismarck Triple Alliance effort to dominate the situation by uniting the interests of the Central European Powers under German leadership seemed a master stroke, but it could continue to be effective only while the animating spirit and aim remained conservative and pacific and occupied mainly with keeping dangerous elements down—when the Bismarckian leadership was replaced by a younger and more aggressive one these dangerous elements got beyond control and the chance of success of the Triple Alliance was gone— and with Bismarck's fall there appears also the beginning of the getting together of European elements aiming to make the most of the dangerous developments in order to thwart German control—the Dual Alliance stage passes into the "encirclement" one, while concurrently German policy be-

comes more and more unscrupulous and imperialistic, the Triple Alliance being kept up as an instrument of German domination.

PROBLEMS OF ALSACE-LORRAINE AND POLAND—The definite problems and questions—Alsace-Lorraine—Poland—Italian irredentism—Balkan peninsula—the Mediterranean world and interests necessarily embraced in the Central European field, forming a bridge to connect its problems with the larger ones in Asia and Africa.

## VIII. Development of the War Situation and the Final Outbreak.

DEMOCRATIC PROGRESS CHECKED BY CAPITALISM—This means a consideration of the political development through the 20 or 25 years preceding the outbreak of the war, i. e., from the fall of Bismarck in 1890 or perhaps better from the formation of the Dual Alliance in 1892—the temporizing, opportunist, Metternichian character of the Bismarckian leadership of European politics and the general results—succession of the Personal government of an impulsive and over-confident young ruler, anxious to play a great part and apparently unconscious of the real situation—an eager exponent of the new Imperialism and under influence of the more astute manipulators of it—impatient of the Bismarck temporizing, endowed with both the romanticism and the realism of Frederick the Great, and probably confident that the time was ripe for the playing of such a great part again—believed that Germany's central position and more efficient wielding of concetrated resources made it possible for her to settle finally the problems of Central Europe by establishing Germany's control there beyond dispute—which would also enable her to bring a dominating weight into the World Empire scrambles of the Powers. Bismarck had addressed himself with great success to maintaining and increasing the antagonism between England on the one hand and France and Russia on the other, while Germany seemed to have got a secure hold on Italian politics and finance.

This seems to be the start of Germany's new aggressive policy, and little doubt that from at least this time she is occupied mainly in preparing for war and in manoeuvring for a good opening—every effort put forth to develope the German forces, especially naval—but at first the idea probably not to attack England directly but to keep her from impeding the German plans, the whole colonial and naval policy being rather in the shape of a menace

to her and being really subsidiary to the plans in Central Europe and Nearer Asia and Africa.

British Foreign Policy—The first decade of the twentieth century changes the situation through the great change in English foreign policy and relations brought about mainly by Edward VII's keen insight into the situation and successful efforts to end the collisions of England with France and Russia and make ready for the German danger—no doubt this was the policy of "encirclement" that Germany complained of, and hence the plausibility of the German contention that it is responsible for the war. If the war had not finally come as it did and if its progress had not since taught us so much of the German aims and methods, we might be misled on this point; as it is, we can now have little doubt that the English policy was defensive, that Edward and Delcassé were astute and well-informed, and that the discovery by Germany of the miscarriage of her plans caused a conflict with England to become in her mind "inevitable"—and there can also be little doubt that this conflict would have been braved earlier if the naval development had been further advanced, and especially if the submarine had earlier reached a dependable stage.

The various points of friction and successive crises—the final opportunity and German conspiracy.

## IX. The European War Becomes a World War.

Why a World War?—Could it have remained simply a European war? Why does it become a World war, and what does that development mean? If fought as earlier wars had been it probably would have remained and ended European, and would probably then have come before this time to a conclusion that would be only a truce—this result has been made impossible by German methods of warfare, and by the disclosures the war has brought as to the German menace to the peace and progress of the world—these disclosures have further brought forward the more fundamental issue as to the survival (with modern improvements) in Germany of an Old Regime spirit and policy, and of the necessity for Democracy to demonstrate its right to live in a world so menaced.

## X. General Aspects and Results of the World War. The Impending Transformation of Europe. The Advance of Americanism.

MISLEADING LESSONS OF PREVIOUS WARS—All previous wars fought out on the field of battle and by limited professional forces —a comparatively brief trial of strength sufficient to reach a decision—hence noncombatants and neutrals apart, and recognized as retaining rights—the more recent developments in the application of science to the art of war had not seemed to necessitate any serious change in these respects, the tendency being to regard this development as likely to make the struggle even briefer though perhaps more appalling—a tendency moreover to believe that States would not venture on so terrible a struggle and that international financial interests would be sufficient to preserve peace.

POLICY OF "FRIGHTFULNESS" EXPLAINED—But Germany had studied the matter more seriously and had prepared for a new kind of war, a war of nations employing their whole populations and using all their resources—hence, distinction between combatants and noncombatants would more or less disappear, while netural rights and immunities would also be if necessary disregarded. War would thus assume an aspect that would bring into play all human interests and the whole capital of civilization, and it was clear that humanity could not face a future of such warfare—the German policy apparently was to count on at least such a temporary intimidation of the world in this situation as would enable the German aims to be realized, and this policy was backed up in military practice by a deliberate application of "Frightfulness" that was intended to paralyze all civilian opposition—the result instead was to force all civilized elements to come into action against Germany; there could no longer be real neutrals, and mankind was forced to conclude that warfare and civilization could no longer co-exist.

AMERICAN MOTIVES AND AIMS—The German application of this policy brings about the intervention of America—development of the American policy from standpoint of redress of own injuries to that of the upholder of civilization; European problems taking a secondary place—probable results of this in effecting the transformation of Europe in an American sense—this transformation already under way through the forced concentration of the whole population and of all activities on warfare—and as all are involved in the struggle it has come universally to be recognized as being fundamentally one in the interest of the democratic reorganization of the World.

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